

The intern followed, his other patients forgotten.  
For three days and three nights  
he sat with the boy.  
Whenever the exhausted heart stopped beating  
he was there to call "Code Blue."  
He talked to the unconscious boy  
about sports, music, movies,  
about his own young wife and daughter,  
and about his childhood summers  
hunting quail and picking gooseberries  
in the New Hampshire woods.  
He even sang the wrong words to  
long-forgotten lullabies — anything  
to encourage the boy's tenuous  
hold onto life.

On the third night of the third day  
the intern suddenly looked up from dozing  
into a pair of clear blue eyes.  
The small peaks on the heart monitor  
were slow but regular.  
The boy would live.  
The intern lay his head upon the bed  
and wept — deep, painful sobs.

When the boy was strong enough  
to take nourishment  
the intern asked him the meaning  
of the faint and amateurishly tattooed  
tears he had noticed  
whenever the light was on —  
six under one eye  
and four under the other.  
Were they symbols of some religious sect,  
or perhaps a commentary on the tragedy  
of the entire lousy world?

"Shit, no!" said the boy, smiling  
between sips of broth.  
"They're like notches on a rifle.  
Each one stands for some dumb fucker  
I blew away."

#### THE NOVICE

The message on my answering machine  
was garbled at first —  
the caller was obviously new at this  
and the sounds in the background  
of young children and angry adults  
shouting and throwing things  
made it even harder for me



to understand the child's  
unfamiliar vernacular.  
But the longer he spoke  
the more confident he became,  
and I was able to comprehend  
his basic point:

"Pussy, ass-hole, fuck-face,  
god-damned fat ugly bitch —  
you ugly ol' fat ugly bitch ho' —  
fuck-face, pussy, ass-hole!  
I hate yo' fat ugly guts!  
You fat ol' ugly fuck-face bitch ho'!  
You want me to suck yo' pussy?  
You can SUCK MY COCK!"

O.K., O.K., kid — I get your message!  
You could use some professional  
speech therapy  
and a more polished approach,  
and a lot more variety and imagination,  
but you're not doing badly  
for a five-year-old.

And believe me, I do understand.  
I'm having a shitty day, too.

A NICE PLACE TO VISIT, BUT YOU WOULDN'T  
WANT TO LIVE THERE

The entire ward had recently  
been completely re-decorated.  
The doctors were happy.  
The Board of Directors were happy.  
The staff was happy.  
The patients' families were happy.  
Only the patients themselves  
were not happy.  
They didn't give a shit  
if the walls were Tropical Tangerine  
with Bachelor-Button-Blue trim.  
The beds now had matching coverlets,  
the carpet was so thick you sank into it,  
and every chair, table, lamp, curtain,  
even the tooth brush holders,  
were color-coordinated.

Doctor visits did not increase  
from the usual one hour a week.  
Physical therapy continued to consist of  
making beads out of Reader's Digest pages  
and Elmer's glue.  
The group therapist was still the same